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ABSTRACT

Following a discussion of problems involved in using composition research, this paper describes six categories of research from which a taxonomy of compositional competencies may be abstracted: studies of rhetoric and discourse structure, developmental research, research on the composing process, research on various practice activities other than actual writing, studies of the evaluation of writing, and textbooks that provide a unique slant on the writing process. For each research category, the work of prominent researchers is cited. The paper then explains and presents a taxonomy of compositional competencies, organized in five general categories: lexical and sentential competencies, discourse competencies, psychological competencies, competence in conforming to "the rules of the writing game," habit structures and self-governance, and accidental problems requiring special instruction or therapy. The final section of the paper describes types of activities and materials that should be considered in planning instructional programs in composition, including wide reading and vocabulary learning, assignment sequences, prewriting worksheets, booklets of model writing, writing checklists, and sentence combining practice. (GW)

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A TAXONOMY OF COMPOSITIONAL COMPETENCIES

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Introduction

Comprehensive strategies for teaching a complex skill are best formulated against a detailed background analysis of the targeted learning. Such is the case in the teaching of writing. In this paper I have identified a number of competencies brought into play in composing written English. I do not claim exhaustiveness or that we have precisely described these competencies or the specific conditions promoting their acquisition. But I do think that research on language and learning, augmented by commonsense observations, points to their existence as separate factors in one's repertoire of verbal abilities. Furthermore, I believe that our most valid decisions about the teaching of writing will be those we make in as broad yet as balanced and finely delineated a view of these competencies as we can entertain.

Instructional Theories

Some educators, of course, think in terms of instructional theory, which would be considerably more powerful than a mere roster of competencies. But, in fact, we have no theories of teaching. Hunches and hypotheses are not theories. Last semester's successful lesson plans are not theories. Observations of externalized behaviors of persons engaged in composing are not theories. Statistical tabulations of syntactic structures are not theories. The classroom practice of professional-writers-turned-teacher is not a theory. Even the most ingenious schemes for categorizing the spectrum of discourse, popular from Aristotle to rhetoricians today, are not instructional theories.

Some years ago, in the early days of Chomskyan psycholinguistics, when new linguistic insights were exploding like rockets in a fireworks finale, someone took a poll on how soon we would know enough to formulate a confirmable theory of language teaching. Surprisingly, estimates ranged from 100 to 500 years, depending upon a breakthrough in biochemistry or telepathy. For the moment, therefore,

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we should forget about theories of teaching, and content ourselves with examining the fruits of learning research.

Pitfalls

Whenever someone speaks about the "findings" of language research, I recall Uncle Terwilliger's advice on eating popovers: spit out all the hot air you can, and still be careful what you swallow. Considering the quackery that sometimes passes for serious inquiry into language, one might think this a good rule to follow. There are still many teachers who cannot get the odious scientism of some kinds of research unstuck from their craws--its jargon, its mathematics, its empirical method. But the truth is, today's composition research is better than many of the persons reading it. To put it another way, the hot air to be spat out comes mostly from ourselves rather than the popover.

What I mean is that we suffer from misguided expectations, from a wrong view of what the bottom line of a research study should say. Somehow we have gotten it into our heads that a piece of research ought to end up by giving us at least a classroom gimmick, or better yet "an approach" to teaching something, or maybe even "the answer" to a large educational problem. In fact, research tells us only about learning--even research in the form of experimental tryouts of particular classroom activities. Why? Reflecting a moment, we see that any decision we make about teaching, whether rational or intuitive, is made against a background of all that we know about learning, and the only way the results of a particular teaching decision can be generalized is by feeding back and adding to that background knowledge of learning. This is why theories of teaching are still so far in the future.

Unfortunately, because of our misguided expectations and the difficulty of bringing the whole background into perspective as the only foreground, and because so many researchers grow overly enthusiastic when they come to writing up implications for teaching, not a few curriculum developers and teachers have been lured by recent studies into silly one-dimensional faddish excesses. Consider the current scene in composition teaching. Some teachers, for instance, have allowed a newly awakened concern for the pre-writing stage of composing, valid as it is, to dominate their teaching to the virtual exclusion of attention to editing skills. But it is as bad to get stuck at one end of a pendulum as the other. Others, in response to proselytism coming originally from Great Britain, now sponsor so

much expressive writing that they never get around to the expository--and thereby, in my view, toss out the baby with the bathwater. Still others are misguidedly trying to build entire composition programs around sentence-combining practice, as if sentences and discourses were coterminous. Faddishness, nearsightedness, vulnerability to the hard educational sell coupled with a naive belief in simple solutions, and often a tendency to post with unseemly haste to commercial publication--these are the pitfalls awaiting users of today's quite excellent composition research.

With these introductory points in mind, let me begin by examining, in a necessarily brief and superficial way, the main outlines of this research, which is the base from which I have abstracted the taxonomy of compositional competencies.

The Research Base

Another problem with research on writing is that there is so much of it. What are its limits? How can we sort it out and keep it all in proportion? Faced with diversity, one does what the mind always does: invent superordinate organizing categories. I have invented six. One or two may seem to stretch somewhat the conventional notion of research. Nonetheless, I have found them extremely useful in processing--and I must say evaluating--the great amount of information one needs to keep in mind in integrating a reasonably complete and balanced view of compositional competence.

Category One: Discourse Structure

Some researchers prefer the term rhetorical theory. Studies of rhetoric and discourse structure begin, of course, with Plato and Aristotle. Researchers take as their object of study any text they find interesting. Their method is analytical and the linguistic level suprasentential, though sentences and words are the basic units. Some researchers try to locate pieces of discourse in relation to the points of the rhetorical triangle--speaker (ethos), audience (pathos), or subject (logos). Some categorize whole discourses according to their semantic purport or dominant purpose. Others concentrate upon identifying and classifying types of "connections" within discourses. Still others work primarily on paragraphs and sentences.

At the whole-discourse level, contemporary thinking has been enriched by the rhetorical theories of Kinneavy (1971) and D'Angelo (1975), along with the work, develop-

mental in purport, of Moffett (1968) and Britton (1970, 1975). Becker (1965) and Braddock (1974) stand out for their contributions to paragraph study. Winterowd (1975) has described the main types of logical connections among sentences. Christensen (1967) contributed signally to our understanding of the relationship between syntax and style in the sentences and paragraphs of mature prose, and Pitkin (1977) is developing a nomenclature for characterizing the semantic functions of discourse constituents both within and across the boundaries of orthographic sentences. N. Chomsky (1965) and his followers, as is well known, have characterized, in generative fashion, the phonetic and syntactic structures of the sentence system invariantly acquired by all who possess language. Fillmore (1968) and the generative semanticists are describing the primary semantic functions within elementary predications. Searle (1969) and the speech act theorists are studying presuppositions, implicatures, performatives, and other constraints on communicative performance. Taken as a whole--and we ought more often to think of investigations at the several linguistic levels as being of a piece--this research characterizes the knowledge of grammatical, lexical, and semantic structures (most of it tacit, much of it still to be acquired by students of grade-school age, and some of it needing to be overtly taught) that persons bring to bear in the production of written discourse.

Category Two: Developmental Research

A few researchers have sought to depict the sequence of developmental stages traversed chronologically and in regular order by young writers en route to acquisition of mature discourse competence. A stage-sequence model of this sort might parallel in form the theories of Jean Piaget in logical thought, Erik Erikson in personality growth, or Lawrence Kohlberg in moral development.

Most noteworthy to date is the work of James Moffett in the United States and James Britton in England. Both begin by elaborating a view of the whole spectrum of written discourse and then speculate how the developing child progresses toward mastery of its parts. Moffett (1968) postulates the dimensions of abstractive altitude and rhetorical distance. Development consists of movement up the abstractive scale, from dramatic recording to narrative telling to expository generalizing to tautologic theorizing; at the same time, the learner progresses outward on the rhetorical scale, from contemplation to conversation to correspondence to public writing. Britton (1970) discerns two roles a person may assume in using language--that of

spectator and that of participant--along with two functions to which language may be put--the transactional and the poetic. Underlying and developmentally anterior to the differentiation of both role and function is expressive language, which is a kind of phatic base (Britton does not use that word) initially manifest in children's speech but never wholly discarded by the maturing person. Out of expressive language, in some manner, emerges knowledge of the controlling organizational properties of transactional writing and the controlling aesthetic features of poetic writing.

Rather disappointingly, however, empirical confirmation of Moffett's and Britton's speculations has been slow in coming. Apart from plentiful examples of expressive intrusions and egocentrism in juvenile writing, no one has yet been lucky enough to stumble across--or clever enough to procure, or discerning enough to recognize--writing samples clearly reflecting in-progress stage-sequence acquisition of given discourse structures on the part of the writer--evidence, for example, that at Time 1, A has been acquired but not B and C; that at Time 2, A and B appear but not C; and that at Time 3, A, B, and C are all present in the writer's repertoire.

We do, of course, have developmental research on the acquisition of syntax and vocabulary. Brown, Cazden, and Bellugi (1969), C. Chomsky (1969), and others have charted the initial acquisition of grammatical structures. Studies of vocabulary growth and word fluency abound. Hunt's (1965) T-unit research, and Loban's (1976) examinations of the same thing called by the name communication unit, give us statistical information about changes in the intrasentential deployment of syntactic structures across the 12 years of school. But we have little or nothing in the way of actual empirical knowledge about the development of discourse competence.

On the other hand, since we know that children in the upper elementary and early secondary grades, when sufficiently motivated, can in their speech produce fragments of surprisingly mature arguments and explanations, and since we regularly require children to read or listen to passages embodying discourse structures in all forms, we must conclude that discourse competence is acquired prior to the time in school when we typically assign very much expository composition. Failures to manifest it in writing are the result of two factors: (a) physical and psychological demands peculiar to the writing act which children learn to meet only with further maturation and specific instruction

and experience in writing; and (b) the fact that the vocabulary of transitional and connective locutions required in the writing of extended discourse does not become active until the secondary school years. This view accounts for our inability to turn up empirical evidence supporting the developmental aspect of Moffett's and Britton's work, since we ought to be looking for such evidence not in the writing of secondary-school youngsters but rather in the talk of elementary-grade children.

Category Three: The Composing Process

In the present decade a number of research pieces have appeared utilizing case study methods to scrutinize, as if in stop-action photography, the overt behaviors of students engaged in the activity of composing. The research of Emig (1971) was the first to capture attention, followed by that of Stallard (1974), Graves (1975), Mischel (1974), and others. Linguists and other psychologists at first questioned the point of the inquiries, since they deal with behaviors far removed from the mentalistic plane, or the "thought inside" of language acts, where theories are grounded. But educators immediately drew from them rich insights for the classroom. Seeing the composing process segmented into pre-writing, specific planning, transcribing, and reformulating, teachers found themselves inventing all manner of intervention activities as aids to student writers at each stage of the process. Oral composing, frequent stopping to reflect upon and contemplate what one has written, extended pre-writing jottings, slowing down, keeping consciously in mind the purpose of one's writing, and other behaviors and habits that could be drawn to students' attention were recognized as desiderata. Our conventional assumptions about the amount of time required for writing were overturned, especially in the case of impromptu writing assigned in class.

Moreover--although the point should hardly have needed empirical confirmation--research on composing provided evidence that the extent to which writing is self-sponsored rather than teacher-required and spectator rather than participant governs the extent to which student writers will undertake and persevere in productive composing behaviors. All in all, the least one can say about research on the composing process is that it merely points up what good writers have always learned to do on their own. The most to be said is that it has given writing teachers everywhere a whole new set of handles for teaching, along with renewed zeal and optimism. Given the choice, why not say the most? Notice, too, that some researchers on the composing process

are joining forces with neurophysiologists in what has come to be called left brain/right brain research, thus playing out yet another chapter of the longstanding controversy between mentalism and empiricism, between attempts to construct models of the mind and efforts to map empirically the structure of the brain.

Category Four: Calisthenic Practice

One cannot overlook the substantial body of research on various practice activities other than actual writing which are said to develop or enhance writing ability. Several things come immediately to mind: oral language use, essay analysis, stylistic imitation, grammatical drillwork, and sentence-combining practice. Teachers in England have believably popularized the argument that oracy promotes literacy, while individuals on both sides of the Atlantic have experimented with role-playing, improvisations, focused small-group discussion, and narrative talk as activities conducive to the nurturing of writing skill. No one really knows the value of analyzing model essays or writing short exercises requiring close stylistic imitation; having stood the test of time, however, these activities doubtless will remain in use.

Turn now to grammar study. The most widely quoted sentence in all writing research pertains to grammar. It appears in Research in Written Composition (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, 1963): "The teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing." (p. 37) Popular as it has been, the sentence is two parts false and only one part true. Insofar as it pertains to the involvement of overtly stated grammatical principles in right/wrong drillwork aimed at changing usage or dialect, it is exactly on target. But insofar as it pertains to the nomenclature for labeling surface structures of written sentences and to the display of these structures arrayed in certain stylistically notable sentence patterns, it maligns a method of teaching that has worked for millions of students and thousands of teachers throughout the history of education. To paraphrase T. S. Eliot's Sweeney, "I gotta use words when I talk to you about your words"--and grammatical terms and diagrams are the words and graphic devices invented for just that purpose.

Moreover, the sentence is flatly wrong in its "harmful effect" contention. This fact has most recently been demonstrated by a 3-year longitudinal study of the role of

grammar in the secondary English curriculum, a study conducted in New Zealand and reported in America (Elley, Barnum, Lamb, & Wyllie, 1976). Two groups of students studied grammar; a third group studied no grammar but was given extra reading and writing. Not one of the 102 comparisons on a variety of test factors over the 3-year period (including analyses of student compositions) favored the no-grammar-but-extra-writing group. Elsewhere I have pointed out that a pervasive error orientation in grammar teaching will have an inhibiting effect on student writing. But the New Zealand study constitutes powerful research evidence disproving the contention that merely by displacing extra writing practice, grammar teaching exerts a harmful effect on the improvement of writing. It is just not so. Teachers who believe in the efficacy of teaching students to recognize and identify the forms and functions of sentential surface structures may do so in confidence and good conscience so long as they keep grammar in balance with other aspects of composition teaching and avoid undue emphasis on error.

One of the newest forms of calisthenic activity is sentence-combining practice. My own research (Mellon, 1969) and that of O'Hare (1973) and a number of others, coupled with the success of Strong's (1973) textbook, unmistakably confirm the claim that sentence-combining practice does enhance syntactic fluency--the ability to craft increasingly diversified sentence structures. My research used a technical cuing system; the vogue at present is for "apparatus free" exercises. It is often wrongly stated that sentence-combining practice merely requires writers to subordinate what they would otherwise coordinate or write in separate sentences. Not so. It helps young writers learn to see more and say more than they otherwise would, just as mature writers have learned to do. What occurs is primarily a cognitive act and only secondarily the exercise of grammatical options. Whenever one uses language, the essential process carrying the elementary predications of thought into the surface structure of mature speech and writing is that of sentence combining. More important even than aptness of vocabulary, it is the basic expressive fluency.

Nor is sentence combining always an option, even if we assume a plenitude of ideational content in the writer's intention, since semantic constraints governing the grammatically hierarchical arrangement of that content require that much of it occur as subordinate inclusions within the boundaries of orthographic sentences. If it is cast instead in the form of separate orthographic sentences, the

discourse becomes a botch both ideationally and aesthetically. There is much more to sentence combining than persons imagine who see it only as icing on the linguistic cake. By the same token, however, sentence combining is not a rhetoric unto itself. We would do well to nip in the bud efforts to pass it off as a comprehensive approach to the teaching of writing, just as we should laugh out of existence current attempts to hang the label "sentence combining" on what are for the most part conventional composition programs.

Category Five: Evaluative Description and Scoring

Like anything else taught in school, writing must be descriptively evaluated in the course of testing students for purposes such as assigning letter grades, prescribing further study, and deciding college admissions. Teachers call the process grading or marking (the latter a far better term); commercial testers call it scoring. Diederich (1974) and his colleagues at the Educational Testing Service have been particularly helpful to writing researchers and large-scale testers through their identification of factors in the judgment of writing ability and their development of techniques for rapid reading and holistic scoring of essays. The latter are quite useful in rank-ordering students and establishing measures of central tendency in samples of writing whose quality levels serve as dependent variables in composition research.

More recently, however, as a result of issues raised in the writing assessment conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (a project aimed at assessing conditions of knowledge generally possessed by groups of people rather than testing the learning levels of individual students), we now realize how vacuous are holistic scalar scores with respect to specific rhetorical features of writing. More importantly, through fuller elaboration of measurement objectives (for example, those of the second-round Writing Assessment) and careful integration of topic with scoring rubric, we now understand how it is possible to gain richly detailed information not only on the primary rhetorical trait of a piece of writing, as governed by its topic, but on secondary traits extending to all aspects of the piece. My own study of National Assessment has contributed modestly in this regard, but principal credit goes to Rexford Brown of the Assessment staff and in particular to Richard Lloyd-Jones and Carl Klaus (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1976), who developed the primary trait concept. Primary trait has positive implications for teaching as well as testing, in individual classrooms and

local settings as well as nationally.

Category Six: Idiosyncratic Textbooks

It perhaps seems strange to regard textbooks on writing as pieces of research. And in the usual case of texts from publisher A that merely imitate the texts from publisher B that ape the texts from publisher C, this is surely true. On the other hand, there do appear on the market, from time to time, truly original texts, idiosyncratic texts--texts whose authors clearly have a unique slant on the writing process. Insofar as these special slants alter our own perceptions, they obviously further extend and elaborate our total view of composition learning. In this very important sense they count as research, just as much as do the most empirically rigorous clinical experiments. I have in mind texts such as the following, listed in no particular order:

Writing without Teachers by Peter Elbow (Oxford University Press)

Writing for the Fun of It by Robert and Isabel Hawley (Education Research Associates Press)

A Writer Teaches Writing by Donald Murray (Houghton Mifflin)

On Writing Well by William Zinsser (Harper and Row)

Telling Writing by Ken Macrorie (Hayden Book)

English through Poetry Writing by Brian Powell (F. E. Peacock)

Growth through English by John Dixon (Oxford University Press)

Stop, Look, and Write! by Hart Day Leavitt and David Sohn (Bantam)

English for Maturity by David Holbrook (Cambridge University Press)

Sentence Combining by William Strong (Random House)

A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, K-13 by James Moffett (Houghton Mifflin)

Topics in English by Geoffrey Summerfield (B. T. Batsford)

Language in Thought and Action by S. I. Hayakawa (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich)

Sense and Sensitivity by Patrick Creber (University of London Press)

Wishes, Lies, and Dreams by Kenneth Koch (Vintage)

Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student by Edward Corbett (Oxford University Press)

Obviously space does not permit me to comment on these textbooks, some of which are new, some old. From each I learned something I had not thought about before that writers ought to know and therefore also teachers of writing. Persons who have read these books know what I mean. To others, I heartily recommend them as research worthy of the name.

The Taxonomy

In developing the following taxonomy of compositional competencies, I have, of course, drawn upon more than the various lines of research just alluded to. I have relied upon common sense and have sought the counsel of writing teachers to whom the researchers' names in the foregoing paragraphs are largely unknown. I have imagined a number of so-called psychological competencies whose grounding is hypothetical rather than empirical. I admit to the inclusion of some fairly stodgy assumptions about the necessity for hard work and perseverance by students in the face of awareness that the activities of schooling are essentially artificial activities--warm-ups, practices, rehearsals, dummy runs--much as we may try to make them otherwise.

The taxonomy does not separately categorize basic linguistic competence--that is, the tacit knowledge of grammar (phonetics, syntax, and elemental semantics) and the lexical feature system that all persons acquire (with minor exceptions) during their preschool years. Instead, the components of this knowledge appear in various places in the taxonomy. Transformational relations, for example, are the substance of syntactic fluency, and the semantic relations of elemental statements ("basic sentences") constitute the building blocks of discourse competence. Knowledge of orthographic rules is analogous to phonetic knowledge, since the two are counterpart variants representing the surface

structure of language. The reason I have scattered the components of grammar in this fashion is to de-reify in our minds the transformational linguist's familiar three-part model for describing the deep-to-surface structural relations in sentences. Thus I hope to lead composition teachers to recognize what a few discourse analysts are on the verge of acknowledging--namely, that the orthographic sentence (equivalently, the T-unit or independent clause) is a grammatical artifact only, whose role in the semantic structuration of discourse is vacuous and accidental, much like that of the phoneme in distinctive-feature phonology. In short, "going beyond the sentence" might never have become such a stumbling block in contemporary discourse studies had it not been for our fixation on transformational grammatical models.

But enough comment. Here, finally, is the taxonomy of compositional competencies, organized in five general categories:

I. Lexical and Sentential Competencies

A. Vocabulary content: One cannot write without words. Everyone has a basic vocabulary, but it is in extending beyond the basic that students begin to acquire what we might agree to consider true "vocabulary competence." The words we know, to a very large degree, are a direct measure of the knowledge we possess, structured in mind in an intricate conceptual web. The greater the content of a writer's vocabulary, the more he knows and the more he has potentially to say. Putting it slightly more generally, there is a sense in which knowledge, as represented in the words we know, is our most important compositional competency.

B. Vocabulary fluency: The ability to call forth readily out of one's vocabulary just the right words for each basic statement one chooses to make. "Rightness" is judged according to considerations of primary meaning and connotation as well as tonal concordance with the surrounding context. Basic statements are the elementary sentential propositions ("basic sentences") whose structures abstractly underlie the orthographic surface of text. It is by their agency that pure thought is represented verbally.

C. Syntactic fluency: The ability to deploy within each full sentence that one constructs all the

basic statements that arise in mind and are deemed appropriate for inclusion by grammatical subordination. Possessing syntactic fluency means that, by use of syntactic processes known as coordination and embedding, the writer is readily able to combine within the surface structure boundaries of individual sentences, in forms whose predications may be finite (clauses), non-finite (verbal phrases and conjoined elements), or wholly deleted (modifiers and compounds) as many elementary statements as arise from thought and recommend themselves for grammatical subordination within these sentence boundaries. It also means that the writer is able to render such combinations in ways that are stylistically concordant from sentence to sentence in the same piece of discourse.

II. Discourse Competencies

A. Recognition that the structure of meaning is integrative and hierarchical: The ability to understand a group of words that mean different things taken separately as one thing when read in a sentence. Similarly, the ability to understand a group of sentences meaning separate things when read apart from one another as meaning one thing when read in a passage of connected discourse. Put somewhat more technically, the ability to recognize that language represents thought hierarchically, and that any unit of language--from the individual word up through elementary and surface-structure sentences to supra-sentential discourse chunks and ultimately whole discourses (which may range in length from a single orthographic sentence to many thousands of sentences)--is both a whole consisting of and defined by its parts and at the same time an (actual or potential) part of another larger whole. When viewed as a whole, any unit of language means whatever the sum of the semantic relations of its parts makes it mean; when viewed as a part of some larger whole, it performs a semantically identifiable function in establishing the meaning of the larger whole.

B. Recognition of logico-semantic relations: The ability to understand how words fit together to make meaning, and to recognize the many semantic connections that unite elementary statements into larger units of idea. Put more technically, the ability to comprehend and produce the full range of

logical and semantic relations which endow any temporally linear sequence of words and sentences with a hierarchical structure representative of their thought. Through the agency of these logico-semantic relations, the meanings of separate words are arranged into elementary statements and their contextual reference established. The amalgamated meanings of each basic statement are then hierarchically compiled, through the further agency of these logico-semantic relations, on the one hand formally (i.e., syntactically) into the surface structures of orthographic sentences, and on the other hand ideationally into supra-sentential discourse chunks for which we lack an exhaustive nomenclature. These logico-semantic relations operate at three levels, as follows:

1. Elementary statements: intra-propositional (word-to-word) relations established by the syntax of "basic sentences."

   a. Relations of case category, such as: agent, instrument, object, recipient, source, path, goal, manner, place, time, duration.

   b. Relations of attribution, such as: traits, qualities, features, aspects, physical properties, appurtenances, ownership.

   c. Relations of modality, such as: tense (past or present), voice (active or passive), affirmation (positive or negative), verbal aspect (progressive or perfected), mood (e.g., future, conditional, emphatic), and purpose (e.g., declaring, commanding, requesting, querying, promising).

   d. Relations of implication, such as presuppositions, entailments, analyticity, falsity.

2. Inter-sentential conjunctive relations, such as: coordinate (and), disjunctive (or), adversative (but), causal (because), purposive (in order that), conditional (if), concessive (although), comparative (more, less, same), or temporal (when). Relations of conjunction may cross over or remain within the boundaries of surface-structure sentences.

3. Supra-sentential relations among hierarchically

structured discourse chunks, such as: temporal sequences, step-by-step process sequences, ordinal sequences arranged according to an endless variety of ordering criteria, geometric and spatial configurations, cause/effect sequences, reason/purpose sequences, same/different assertions (comparison and contrast), class/subclass inclusions and exclusions (definition and classification), truth assertions and inferences stemming illatively from the premise-and-conclusion system of syllogistic logic, hypothetical and suppositional assertions, assertions of value and worth, assertions of affective status and emotive level, and many more.

C. Recognition of organizational unity as governed by dominant purpose: The ability to plan and organize whole discourses (e.g., notes, comments, letters, themes, papers, articles, and treatises) that are unified by a single dominant transactional purpose, and display a primary rhetorical trait.

1. Informational writing: One broad category of transactional writing is informational in purpose in that the whole piece of discourse may seek, for example, to record, report, characterize, define, analyze, classify, compare, distinguish, reason logically to conclusions, explain, exemplify, analogize, generalize, or theorize.

2. Conative writing: A second category of transactional writing is conative in purpose in that the entire piece may seek to instruct, recommend, demand, legislate, regulate, judge, advocate, argue, or persuade.

(Note: Two kinds of non-transactional writing also exist. Opposite to transactional (expository) writing is literary writing, whose subject matter is imaginative and fictive, whose mode is narrative or dramatic or lyric, and whose aesthetic features may be poetic. Between the two is expressive writing, which tends to be unstable as to purpose and form, unstructured, and most immediately reflective of the continuously variable state of human intention. The distinctions and terminology used here are those of James Britton.)

D. Recognition that intention may be expressed implicitly as well as explicitly: The ability to convey

intention implicitly rather than solely by literal statement, by use of devices such as metaphor and other forms of imagery, tone and mood, rhythms and balances, irony, sarcasm, innuendo, anger, humor, flattery, and mockery.

III. Psychological Competencies

A. The ability to discover (invent in one's mind or collect from external sources, including the minds of other people) telling ideas that serve both as a stimulus to one's own further thought and as the direct content of one's writing.

B. The ability to cast these ideas creatively--that is, to arrange, manipulate, and ultimately verbalize these ideational elements in ways that match dissimilars, that are novel and unexpected, that are perceived as simultaneously spontaneous and apt, and that to an appreciable extent prove effective and memorable.

C. The ability to think bi-channelly--necessary if one is to be able to inscribe what is being written at the moment while simultaneously storing in memory what has arisen in verbal consciousness but is yet to be written, thereby avoiding the "I can't write as fast as I'm thinking the words" problem.

D. The ability to prevent, control, or overcome writing apprehension, and to forestall or master "blank page" aphasia.

IV. Competence in Conforming to "The Rules of the Writing Game"

There are two ways in which writing may be considered a game-like artifice. One way pertains to the essential difference between writing and speech. Speech is naturally learned and (except when we are not quite certain about what we are saying) spontaneously performed. Writing, however, utilizes a somewhat different vocabulary and consists of extended and deeply hierarchical structures in which relations of parts to wholes must be signaled by explicit verbal devices. These matters have to be overtly learned and consciously attended to in the crafting of written language.

The second way pertains to writing done in schools, wherein the writer, to be accounted successful, must

learn to maintain certain pretenses--chiefly, that topics are self-initiated when in reality they are teacher-imposed, and that one's audience is an undifferentiated adult public when in reality it is just one's teacher or, at best, one's teacher and a few classmates. In recent years many educators have sought to eliminate the need for these pretenses by devising ways to make the purpose and audience of school writing seem "for real." But no matter how it may be made to seem, it almost never really is real. Thus it seems preferable to acknowledge to students the game-like quality of school writing and to proceed directly towards finding ways of helping them assume the pretenses required.

A. Knowing how to introduce a topic (hence, begin an essay) as if the ideas expressed were put forward on the writer's own initiative rather than in response to an externally-imposed topic question.

B. Knowing how to employ the many transitional/referential locutions essentially unique to writing, whose function is to "signpost" or otherwise tag and render verbally explicit the ideational structure of any piece of discourse.

C. Knowing how to draw to a close any piece of writing by means of the many appropriate strategies the written language uses to signal endings and conclusions.

D. Knowing which words of the spoken language (especially coterie slang, conversational and juvenile locutions, and expressive intrusions of other sorts) are barred from the formal registers of transactional writing, unless used intentionally for effect.

E. Knowing how to achieve a particular writing style or styles, largely through tonal concordances in vocablary choice and rhythmic repetitions of syntactic structures and idea patterns, and knowing when to shift styles.

F. Knowing how to recognize and meet the informational needs of a general and undifferentiated reading audience as distinct from those of a known correspondent or one or more auditors present in a speech situation.

G. Knowing how to conform to the mechanical conventions of orthography (e.g., spelling, punctuation, capital-

ization, syntactic form, and manuscript form).

V. Habit Structures and Self-Governance

A. Pre-writing: The habit of devoting sufficient time and effort (as measured by the success of the final product) to the discovery (collection and invention) of content, and to thought and planning about its appropriate organization.

B. Decenteredness: The ability to maintain all parts of a piece of writing under the control of a unified purpose, and to continually monitor and edit one's writing with an eye to its specific reading audience.

C. Reflectiveness: The habit of rehearsing elements of one's sentences repeatedly in mind prior to their inscription, and of stopping frequently to re-read and contemplate what one has written to that point.

D. Effort and staying power: The willingness to engage in the hard, trying, and demanding work of composing written discourse, and to persevere until the final proofreading.

E. Criticism and revision: The willingness to accept tutelary criticism, and often to revise or discard and recompose writing already "completed."

F. Risk-taking: The willingness to try out new structures and modes of expression as a necessary step in their mastery.

VI. Accidental Problems Requiring Special Instruction or Therapy

A. First-language intrusions, where English is a second language.

B. Spoken-dialect intrusions, where Formal or Standard American Written English is the accepted objective of instruction.

C. Spelling dyslexia, and other biological (brain damage) dysfunctions.

Decisions about Teaching

In reviewing the above taxonomy, I am well aware that many teachers will say, "But it's so abstract! My students

couldn't begin to comprehend material like that." To which I answer: It is abstract, for the simple reason that the structure of written discourse, of language, of learning--indeed, the structure of anything--is by its very nature abstract. The processes of linguistic production/comprehension, though non-conscious, are abstractive processes. To understand that language makes meaning hierarchically rather than in a beads-on-a-string linear manner is to require that the teacher of language (whether reading or writing) be able to recognize this hierarchical structure and speak about it comprehensibly in the course of explicating pieces of writing, whether of the students' own or published pieces, or whatever. Failing this ability, teachers are limited to a pedagogy that amounts to little more than fussing with orthography.

As to students comprehending the material of the taxonomy, we must remember that comprehension occurs in many forms. Discourse competence, like grammatical competence, is tacitly acquired as a result of experiences in language use. Teaching about the structure of discourse consists mainly of calling students' attention to this or that structural feature of a passage, pointing out, commenting, asking what the consequences would be had some other form been used, and so on--making use of such technical nomenclature as may be required without allowing the nomenclature to dominate the teaching. Lexical and syntatic fluency--and also, perhaps, creativity--may be developed by calisthenic practices. The "rules of the writing game" are, by the high school years, straightforwardly teachable. High apprehensions may be identified and dealt with through individual counseling. The desirability of certain composing behaviors may be explained and their habituation nurtured. In short, everything contemplated by the taxonomy can realistically be incorporated in programs of classroom instruction.

Eight Recommendations

In my view, the teaching of expository composition (transactional writing) should not begin until the secondary grades. Two prerequisites must be established. One concerns prior writing activities, the other the "gentling" of children. All manner of expressive writing and writing in the spectator role should be encouraged during the upper elementary grades and during the middle school years as counterpoint to the transactional--journal writing, memory writing, the recording of sensory impressions, and personal narratives. These activities are nonthreatening and often fun; they tend to block the development of apprehensiveness and they often lead to rewarding forays into literary

writing, familiarly referred to as creative. By "gentling" I simply mean calming the anxieties of children, integrating and interpersonally acquainting them in classroom groups, and trying to provide during the school hours some of the social structure they miss on the outside owing to the breakdown of families, the lack of parenting, too many hours before the TV, and too many meals in fast-food restaurants. On this point, I am surprised but pleased to hear teachers report that the main payoff of the small-group activities comprising James Moffett's "Interaction" materials is not composition per se but just the sort of socialization I am describing. Without this gentling, nothing can be taught or learned but frustration.

Now let me present eight recommendations I believe teachers and curriculum coordinators would do well to consider in planning their instructional programs.

1. Wide reading and vocabulary learning. Neither of these activities falls within the province of composition teaching, yet both are essential to the development of writing ability. Vocabulary learning should be the objective of every subject in the curriculum, but the responsibility is usually passed to the English teacher. Wide reading (as distinct from close analysis of selected texts) can often be so seductive that the hard work of composition teaching gets lost in the shuffle, as happened in many schools that substituted elective programs for the traditional English syllabus. The issue is as old as the English curriculum, but I prefer at present to separate composition teaching from literature and media study. In that way one can tell at a glance whether either is receiving short shrift.

2. Assignment sequences. Teachers (or curriculum specialists or commercial houses) should develop full-year or full-course sequences of weekly (or more frequent) writing assignments printed in loose-leaf format for manufacture in class lots and distribution one by one to students. Early in the year and in the junior high grades, as noted, the assignments would call for writing which is expressive in purpose and spectator in role. The assignments should range across all types of informational and conative writing and cover a wide variety of topics. The assignments themselves, rather than rhetorical principles or paragraph types, would provide the organizing structure of each year's course of study. Research is needed on the question of optimally sequencing assignments leading to the development of competence in the various modes of discourse.

3. Pre-writing worksheets. Als developed for use with each assignment would be separately printed pre-writing worksheets. These would call for discovery activities, some to be carried on outside of school, some in small groups in the classroom, and some alone--perhaps after consulting source materials. While they would concentrate mainly on the discovery of content, pre-writing worksheets would also contain items requiring students to think about (and jot down notes on) such things as organization, audience, and beginnings and endings.

4. Booklets of model writing. In composition, imitation is an effective mode of learning. Imitation, of course, is really a cover term for the host of cognitive processes that come into play when one attempts to model one piece of discourse on another; it is by no means the simple activity we commonly think it. But it is effective. Secondary schools need to borrow a method from college teaching and make greater use of models providing students with examples of the kind of discourse a given assignment requests. The pitfall to avoid is pitching the models too far above students' heads--as usually happens in college readers. Instead, teachers (or again, whoever is developing the materials) should commission a number of exemplary essays to be written, on a contest or contract basis, in response to some of the actual assignments included in each assignment sequence, by older students or nonprofessional adult writers. These models would be printed in booklets and perhaps followed by questions guiding the study of their structure and content. Most important, students would perceive this writing as being within shooting distance, as pieces they can actually emulate. Otherwise, for most eleventh graders, excerpts from Joan Didion and Garry Wills, for example, are for practical purposes as unreachable as the third act of Hamlet or Milton's Areopagitica.

5. Instructional manuals for peer readership and peer response. The two main problems blocking effective composition teaching are that teachers cannot possibly mark 75 to 150 essays each week and that students write for a readership of one--the teacher. Thus we must arrange matters so that students write for one another as well, and respond to and mark each other's writing (excluding summative evaluation and final grading). We may do this confident in the certainty that they will learn a great deal about their own writing in the bargain. Instructional manuals for this purpose would begin by laying down procedures for the classroom organization of peer readership groups. The basic teaching device thereafter would be sample essays accompanied by exemplary markings and commentary. Natural-

ly, the marking of mechanical errors would be covered, but the main thrust of these manuals would be to illustrate critical commentary on broader aspects of discourse (e.g., idea sequences, organization, logic, style, argumentative and persuasive effectiveness, and unity).

6. Writing checklists. Accompanying the instructional manuals would be a single-sheet writing checklist which would serve as a reminder of the categories of response students should consider in peer marking. These would be produced in pads and provided one per student. College composition programs frequently use this device; secondary schools ought to.

7. Sentence-combining practice. Regardless of the composition program in use, studies now in hand, that are available for everyone to read and judge and have nothing whatever to do with the study of grammatical concepts or nomenclature, indicate with a degree of clarity and force seldom encountered in educational research that every student from Grade 7 through Grade 12 should spend about 10 or 12 minutes of every school day writing out and checking two or three sentence-combining problems. Multi-level sequences containing a total of about 500 sentence-combining problems each should be developed for each grade, manufactured in kit form for individual student use.

8. "Special teacher" status for persons trained in the diagnosis of compositional dysfunctions. We are learning enough about the psychological competencies underlying writing, as well as about the importance of certain kinds of composing behaviors and the identification of specific disabilities, to justify the creation of "special teacher" positions for individuals, credentialed by appropriate graduate study, who would operate diagnostic and special treatment facilities in schools. The need in this area is clear and present, and its potential is wholly untapped.

Conclusion

This paper began by discussing composition research and continued by setting forth a taxonomy of compositional competencies; it concludes by speaking about teaching. I hope that readers have found the progression natural and illuminating. For the future, I hope that interposing a taxonomy of learning between research and practice will keep our teaching responsive to individual lines of research as they appear, without allowing it to lose balance and proportion with respect to everything else we know

about compositional learning--and to the immense amount we still do not know, for which we rely on the mysterie of craft.

To conclude, I wish only to warn against the kind of advice that journalists and professional intellectuals so often give composition teachers whenever word of a 'literacy crisis" gets abroad in the land. With glowing references, for example, to Jacques Barzun, Edwin Newman, and the Strunk and White stylebook, these persons admonish writers and writing teachers as follows: (a) strive for clarity of expression and precision in word choice, (b) write simply, in short declarative sentences, and (c) know what you want to say before starting to write. However suitable for adults who have acquired compositional competence, these admonitions are misleading in the classroom.

Item (a) for instance, will be construed as sanctioning the worst kind of comma-hounding, mechanical nitpicking, and lexical conservatism. Instead, we should encourage students to take risks and to make errors; to write endless imitations (thinking them, as Dylan Thomas said, colossally original, like eggs laid by tigers); and to experiment at all forms of written expression, whether or not they manage them well at first. Item (b) results from naiveté about the formal ingredients of simplicity in style. We know that the independent clauses of mature expository prose are half again as long as those twelfth graders write. They <u>seem</u> simple only because accomplished writers have learned to cast much of the content included within orthographic sentence boundaries in the form of free modifiers--predominantly reduced clauses--that either interrupt the structure of the base clause or cumulate coordinately before or after it. But as Moffett (1968) has observed, children's sentences must grow rank before they can be trimmed. Sentence-combining practice fosters this growth by developing the extremely complex skills underlying seemingly simple expression. To attempt to teach simplicity directly is to misunderstand the course that learning must follow. As to item (c), it is a great mistake to tell students that in writing we merely transcribe what we already know about a topic. The processes of verbal thought are constructive processes, and the overall meanings of discourses are greater than the sums of their parts. We base our thinking upon prior knowledge, to be sure, but in the process of composing and inscribing emergent thought we are actually creating new knowledge not previously possessed. This is why one often hears it said that writing <u>is</u> thinking, or that a person can't know what he thinks about a topic until <u>after</u> he has written about it.

I do not mean, of course, that we should overlook the importance to one's own thought of ideas drawn from external sources. This is particularly true in school writing, where topics are ordinarily imposed rather than self-sponsored, and where students' initial responses are often that they know little or nothing about a given subject and thus have nothing to say about it. For this reason, the collection of ideas from the minds of others is often much more productive of subsequent thought than are attempts to coax invention directly. Obviously we do not want student writers plagiarizing or merely copying sections of composed discourse, but we do want them to "appropriate" elementary ideas whenever and wherever they can.

Finally, as to feelings about the writing act itself, we must remember that there is nothing more exhilarating to the mind than the flash of creativity and invention accompanying the birth of words, whether the ideas those words convey are wholly new or those we have merely enlisted for our own rhetorical ends. It is to this and to the pleasure one takes in the knowledge of a task well performed and in beholding a product well crafted and a self well represented that we must direct young people seeking to know the motives for writing.

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